

# WHO?



# من

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هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ مَرْيَاتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ

hal yandhurūna ʾillā taʾwīlahu yawma yaʾtī taʾwīluh

Do they wait just for it's taʾwīl

On the Day [of Resurrection] it's taʾwīl is finally fulfilled.

(Sūratu-l-ʿĀrāf 7:53)



وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

wa dāʿiyan ʾila-llāhi bi-ʾidhnihi wa sirājam-munīrā

and call to Allāh by His Permission and a shining light

(Sūratu-l-ʿAḥzāb 33:46)



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Reprint of “The Doctrine of Photisms According to Najm Razi”  
from H. Corbin’s, “The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism.”

Charts adapted from *Sirri-i Dibaran* (Lahore 1974) by M.K. Hermansen

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَإِذْ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ  
قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنْتَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

wa-°idhi-bā-tala °ibārāhīma rabbuhu bi-kalimātin fa-°atammahunna  
qāla °innī jā°iluka li-n-nāsi °imāmā : qāla wa min dhurriyyatī?  
qāla lā yanālu °ahdi-ḡḡ-ḡḡālīmīn

And (mention) when °Ibrāhīm was tried by his Lord  
with certain Commands which he fulfilled.

He (his Lord) said:

“I will make you an °Imām (guide or example) to the Nations.”

He said: "And also (°Imāms) from among my off-spring!"

He (his Lord) said:

“My promise does not extend to the oppressors.”

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:124)



إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا خَيْبَ الْمَوْتِ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ ۖ  
وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

°innā naḥnu nuḥyi-l-mawta wa naktubu mā qaddama wa °āṡḡarahum  
wa kulla shay°in °aḡṡaynāhu fī °imāmīm-mubīn

Truly it is We Who bring the dead to life.

We record that which they send before (them), and their footprints.

And all things We have recorded in a Clear Guide.

(Sūrah Yā Sīn 36:12)

°Imām Muḡammad bin °Alī al-Bāqir ؑ, who is highly respected by Sunni Muslims for his knowledge and Islamic scholarship, and revered by Shi°a Muslims for his religious leadership, said that when this verse was revealed, Abu Bakr and Umar ؓ asked the Prophet ﷺ: “Is °imāmīm-mubīn the Torah given to Mūsā ؑ?” The answer was: “No”. Again they asked: “Is it °Injīl, given to Isā ؑ?” The answer was: “No”. Then they asked: “Is it the Qur°ān?” “No.” was the answer again. Then turning towards °Alī ؑ the Prophet ﷺ said: “Truly this is the °Imām in whom Allāh ﷻ has deposited the knowledge of everything.” Then, addressing the people who were present, the Prophet ﷺ said: “Oh people, there is no branch of knowledge Allāh ﷻ did not teach me and I have not conveyed it to °Alī ؑ. Verily Allāh ﷻ has given me wisdom and I have given it to °Alī ؑ. I am the city of knowledge and °Alī ؑ is its gate.”

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انا مدينة العلم وعلي بابها . لا أحد يدخل البيت إلا من خلال البوابة

°ana madinatu-l-°ilm wa °ali bābuhā:

lā °aḥadā yudkhila-l-bayt °illā min khilālu-l-bawābah

I am the city of knowledge and °Alī is its gate.  
One does not enter the house except through its gate:

وَأَتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ° وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

wa°tu-l-buyūta min °abāwābiha wa-ttaqu-llāha la°allakum tuflihūn

So enter houses by their doors  
and be aware of Allāh, so that hopefully you will be successful.

(Suratu-l-Baqarah 2:189)

“Whosoever dies without recognizing the °Imām of his time dies the death of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).” Ahmad b. Hanḃal, *al-Musnad*

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَاهُمْ أَفْقَدَهُ ؕ  
قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا ° إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

°ula°ika-l-ladhīna hada-llāhu fabihudāhumu °iqṭadih  
qul lā °as°alukum °alayhi °ajārā : °in huwa °illa dhikra li-l-°ālamīn  
They are the ones Allāh has guided, so be guided by their guidance.

Say, “I do not ask you for any payment for it.

It is simply a reminder to all beings.”

(Suratu-l-An°am 6:90)

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ ° فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ  
فَأُولَئِكَ يَتَرَوْنَ كِتَابَهُمْ ° وَلَا يَظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا

yawma nadā°ū kulla °unāsin bi-°imāmihih:

faman °ūtiya kitābahu bi-yamīnihi

fa °ūla°ika yaqraūna kitābahum wa la yuḏḥlamūna fatilā

(Remember)

the day when We will call every people with their °Imām;  
then whoever is given his book in his right hand,  
these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.

(Suratu-l-°Isrā 17:71)

1. An °Imām is the Book that is followed, like the Torah, the °Injīl, and Qur°ān; and on the Judgment Day, the people of each book will be summoned with their °Imām.

## Who

2. For those on the path of truth, their ʾImām is a prophet, and for those on the path of misguidance, their ʾImām is a *shayṭān*. And it would be said on that Day: “Bring forth the followers of ʾIb̄rahīm, bring forth the followers of Mūsā, bring forth the followers of Muḥammad, and the truthful people who followed them would rise and would be given their book of deeds in their right hand. Then, it would be said: “Bring forth the followers of the *shayṭāns*, bring forth the followers of the leaders of disbelief,” and they will take their books in their left hands and journey to the Fire.

3. ʾImām is the Book of Deeds, and it would be said on that Day: Oh people of the book of good deeds, Oh people of the book of bad deeds. The reason they are called ʾImāms is because people will follow the books’ judgment, either to the Garden or the Fire.

4. ʾImām means the one who guides and the person who is being followed whether he is sane or insane, a person who is truthful or untruthful, a person like a prophet, a *walī* (guardian) who is in charge of the affairs of the people, *shayṭān*, leaders of misguidance, truthful and false religions, heavenly books and corrupted books.

The tafsīr of al-Qurtubī states that the word “ʾImām” is used to refer to a book which contains every person’s deeds. The tafsīr of ʾIbn Kathīr takes this same view, as well as the tafsīr of at-Tabarī. The summoning of people in this respect is an allegorical expression to mean that on Judgment Day each person will not be separate from either the book or the one whom the person followed for guidance.

5. ʾImām also means “mothers”. A meaning derived from making the word “ʾImām” to be the plural of the word ʾūm (mother/مِ) and who but the mother is the first and foremost teacher of all of us?

What is crucial for this essay on “Who” is that in all these permutations of meaning, “on Judgment Day each person will not be separate from the one whom the person followed for guidance.”

If we then connect and put ʾImām in all of its meanings and forms as prophet, as teacher, as wali, as book, as guide as mother we will perforce come to the teacher and the “teaching” (*taʿālīm*/تعليم).

For there to be teaching there must, perforce, be a teacher, even if it is disembodied in the form of the “book”, but more particularly embodied in the form of some one who is the teacher and that is the “Who” that is the subject of this essay.

There are two key books which should be consulted: The first of which is *Fuṣūl Arbaʿa* or The Four Chapters of Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh and

the second is *al-Milal wa-n-Niḥal* of aṣḥ-Ṣhahraṣṭanī, and specifically the section in the first volume on page 339 which references the *Fuṣul Arbaʿa*.

In the first chapter Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh says that when anyone delivers an opinion he either does it on his own or he has gotten it from someone or somewhere else.

The doctrine of the philosophers is that human reason is the ultimate authority and adequate to provide for human beings the absolute truth about Allāh. Either one needs a teacher to know Allāh or not; but if not, then one cannot prefer one's own speculations to another's – for the denial of an others's views is one's implicit teaching of that other. Accordingly, to maintain any one view means to accept a teacher, an authority – if only one's own self.

In the second chapter Ḥasan-i-Ṣabbāh deals with the Sunni fuqaha or ʿulemāʿ who in any one generation must convey their tradition through individuals, no one of whom could claim in himself more authority than any other teacher. Either the teacher must be ultimately authoritative or any teacher will do.

In the third chapter he comes to the Shīʿā who accept the idea of an ultimately authoritative teacher, the ʾImām, but the authority of the teacher must be capable of being demonstrated or any one teacher or another can be accepted as authoritative (*marjīʿa* / مرجع). The question in this case being, how can we demonstrate the authority of the teacher without some further authority for our demonstration?

In the fourth chapter, in an attempt to solve the problem, he comes to how can we demonstrate that an ʾImām is really *the* ʾImām for anyone can claim to be an ʾImām by dint, perhaps, of his lineage (ahlu-l-bayt or sharifian) or by the working of various miracles etc.

Here he goes into great detail in what first seems like a side issue but, when carefully studied, leads to the crux of the understanding.

This understanding is based on the door through which all people enter ʾIslam, which is the *shahadah*.



Beginning with (لا إله) and then (إلا الله) and then (لا إله إلا الله) and then (لا (محمد رسول الله) and then the shahadah in it's entirety and fullness (لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله). In transliteration these read as *lā ʾilaha* and then *ʾilla-llāh* and then *lā ʾilahaʾilla-llāh* and then *muḥammad -r-rasūlu-llāh* and then *lā ʾilahaʾilla-llah muḥammad-r-rasūlu-llāh*.

In translation this means (in order), “There is no deity” then “except Allāh” then “There is no deity except Allāh”, then “Muḥammad the Messenger of Allāh”, and then “There is no deity except Allāh Muḥammad [is] the Messenger of Allāh.”



“There is no deity” (*lā ʾilaha*/لَا إِلَهَ), a viewpoint held by many in the world, brings us only to the *cul de sac* of atheism. By itself the phrase “except Allāh” (*ʾilla-llāh*/إِلَّا اللَّهَ) has no intrinsic meaning.

When the two are joined together or placed in conjunction; “there is no deity except Allāh (*lā ʾilaha ʾilla-llah*/لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ) then, from the Aristotelian or philosophical point of view, the phrase becomes intelligible by connecting the Necessary with the Possible. From a Muslim point of view, only when we are able to connect the concept of a plurality of godlings (deity or deities – god or gods) with the principle of One G-d or what is Named – Allāh – do we reach the point of intelligibility.

When we use the phrase “Muḥammad [is] the Messenger of Allāh” (*muḥammad rasūlu-llah*/مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ) we are back again at unintelligibility for it makes no sense to speak of a “prophet” unless there is some idea of precisely what G-d he is the prophet of but, on the other hand, our understanding of G-d or Allāh ﷻ is but words unless there is some “one” who can reveal who or what Allāh ﷻ is.

So we come to the “teacher” and the “teaching” or who it is who is the ultimate teacher and what it is that is the ultimate teaching – or if you like – substitute the word ‘absolute’ for there is no teaching greater or more to the point in terms of “Why am I?” or “What am I?” or “What is this?” or “Why is this?” or “How did all of this get here?” then the knowledge or understanding of Allāh ﷻ arises.

Only when we put the two phrases together: “There is no deity except Allāh; Muḥammad [is] the Messenger of Allāh (*lā ʾillha ʾilla-llah muḥammad rasūlu-llah*/لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ)” do we reach the point of any possible understanding of our source and being.

But even that understanding brings us to a further question, which is if we can only know that there is no deity except Allāh ﷻ by some one teaching us this how do we know that that person (the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ) is truly teaching us the Truth and not his opinion?

What is the Truth or Proof of Muḥammad ﷺ or what is called the Haqiqatu-l-Muḥammadiyyah (الحقيقة المحمدية) or, sometimes, al-Ḥikmah an-Nunniyah?

Who

Of this Shāykh al-°Akbar (Ibn °Arabī ة) said:

“Truly, the Unveiling (*kashf*) of the Prophet ؐ is of the most all-encompassing Unveiling (*kashf*). It is entirely a Divine Theophany (*tajalliātu-l-°Ilāhiyah*) – of the All-One Praise-Glory (*al-ḥamd*) that He ؐ is. That is how the Muḥammadan Self-Constitution (*dhāt al-Muḥammadiyah*) forms the Divine Countenance (*wajhu-llāh*), and modulates and reflects It, noumenally (in Itself) and phenomenally.

“That is how the Prophet ؐ seals what is open and opens what is sealed. Though His ؐ Spiritual Successors, especially the First and the Last of Them, i.e., Ḥadrat °Alī ؑ and the Guided One, Ḥadrat al-Mahdi (المهدي), and *those in between*, upon Divine Invitation and Empowerment in the Muḥammadan Image (*sūratu-l-Muḥammadiyah*), have also reached Places of Glory around That-Which-Is [Allāh ؑ], by passing through the Doors of Power (opened and kept open by the Ascension (*mirāj*/المعراج), there is no Prophet, nor Messenger, nor Angel, let alone Walī (ولي), before and after Him ؐ, for Muḥammad ؐ is Muḥammad ؐ, just as Allāh ؑ is Allah ؑ.”

“He *is* what he is – *fīhi mā fīhi* (فيه ما فيه) or in it what is in it and He is what He is.

“Existence (Peace) and Glory (Blessings) of Allāh ؑ, without end, be upon Muḥammad ؐ, the First Light-Spirit – the Absolute Radiant Point of Reality.

“The Spirit of Muḥammad (*ruḥu-l-°adhīmi-l-muḥammadiyah*) ؐ is, and was before the Pen (*qalam*/قلم), the Tablet (*lawḥ*/لوح), and the Throne (°*arsh*/عرش). Muḥammad ؐ is the spirit being (*wujudu-r-ruḥīyah*), around Whose Point of Singularity (*nūn*/ن) the Divine Confluences of Light gather and originate.”

Indeed Muḥammad ؐ is Reality Itself (*ḥaqīqqah*) – with or without the constitutional Realm of Oneness – and the Last Noetic Appearance in Phenomena emanating from the glorious connective Foliage of the Prophetic Tree of Reality, Certainty, and Theophany, Who said, ‘the first thing Allāh created was my Spirit.’ (°*awwalu ma khalāqa-llāhu ruḥi*) and he ؐ also said “I was a Prophet before °Adam was between the clay and the water (*kuntu nabiyyan wa °adamu bayni-l mā°i wa-t-ḥīn*)”.

“By my Utter Secret, Muḥammad ؐ is That-Which-Is; the Greater Spirit – Reality-in-Itself – and, still beyond your limited mirror and knowledge, the Most Hidden Elementary Constitution of the First Universal Intellect (*al-°aql kulli-l-°awwal*).



“His ﷺ First ‘M’ (*mīm*/م) is the Hierarchic-Seat (*maqām*/مقام), i.e., The Heart, of the Divine Presence (*ḥadratu-l-°Ilahiyah*).

“His ﷺ ‘H’ (*ha*/ه) is the Reality (*ḥaqīqah*/حقيقة) of the Divine Being (*wujudu-llāh*/وجود الله).

“His ﷺ Second ‘M’ (*mīm*/م) is the Being or Existence (*wujūd*/وجود) of the Divine Reality (*ḥaqiqatu-l-ḥaqā°iq*).

“His ﷺ ‘D’ (*dal*/د) is the Truth (Haqq) of the Divine Oneness (*°aḥadiyah-wahdaniyah*), which – by Itself – is the Trace (*lutf*/لطف) and Secret (*sirr*/سر) of the Divine Being in the Realm of Union (*°alāmu-l-waḥdāt*/عالم وحدات).

“By my soul, He ﷺ is the Odd and the Even, the Twice-Within and the Twice-Without, neither of the East (*mashriq*/مشرق) nor of the West (*maghrib*/مغرب), whose Essence none can approach, for nothing enters It and none comes out of It, and Whose Subjective Being and Form (*wujūd nunnīyah muḥammadiyah*) shapes, moves and overwhelms the oceanic currents of manifestation, within and without (*bātin wa dhāhir*).

“Oh you among the children of °Ādam ؑ who have only perceived the shifting shadows of the Muḥammadan Reality (*ḥaqiqatu-l-Muḥammadiyah*) in your scanty mirror of self-constitution!

In the Phenomenal-Isthmus (*barzakḥian*) Form of Muḥammad ﷺ, that Blessed Soul ﷺ underwent Ascension (*mi°rāj*/مِعْرَاج) by His own Primordial Sainthood (*walāyatu-l-°azaliyah*) and by His own Self-Constitution (*dhātu-l-kḥuludu-l-Muḥammadiyah*).

And because the Universal Wave-Fronts and Embers of Attraction reached their ultimate zenith and apex due to His own Reality ﷺ being the Entire Greater Spirit Itself (*ruḥu-l-°aḍḥimu-l-kullīyah*), nothing veiled (nor unveiled) Him ﷺ from the Presence of the Most Sacred Essence of Allāh ﷻ, just as no radiance would be powerful enough to hide and manifest Muḥammad ﷺ as Muḥammad ﷺ, other than the Being of Allāh ﷻ.

“Thus Muḥammad ﷺ reached what was to be reached in and of the Essence of the First and Last Single Point of Truth, and was with Allāh ﷻ as the Secret of Allāh (*sirru-llāh*/سر الله), without eidetic veils and parallel manifestations, such that the Two Bows of Reality (*qāba qawsayn*/قاب قوسين) – or That-Which-Is “Closer Still” (*°aw °ādna*/أَوْ أَدْنَى) – of Being and Witnessing (*al-wujūd wa ash-shuhūd*), and of the Absolute and the Possible (*al-wājibu-l-wujūd wa-l-mumkinu-l-wujūd*), were nothing but Muḥammad ﷺ.”

Who

فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ

fa kāna qāba qawsayni °aw adāna

He was two bow-lengths away or even closer

(Sūratu-n-Najm 53:9)



and it is Ḥaḍrat °Alī ؑ who is the “door” to all of what Shāykh al-°Akbar ؑ has written concerning his ؑ state and status and what Allāh ؑ has said and he ؑ has said of himself. As we previously wrote and as the Prophet ؑ said and Allāh ؑ revealed:

إِنَّا مَدِينَةُ الْعِلْمِ وَعَلِيٌّ بَابُهَا . لَا أَحَدٌ يَدْخُلُ الْبَيْتَ إِلَّا مِنْ خِلَالِ الْبَوَابَةِ

°ana madinatu-l-°ilm wa °ali bābuhā:

lā °aḥadā yudkhila-l-bayt °illā min khilālu-l-bawābah

I am the city of knowledge and °Alī is its gate.

One does not enter the house except through its gate

وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ؕ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

wa°tu-l-buyūta min °abāwābiha wa-ttaqu-llāha la°allakum tuflihūn

So enter houses by their doors

and be aware of Allāh, so that hopefully you will be successful.

(Suratu-l-Baqarah 2:189)



إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُبَاعُ بِكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَاعُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِّينِهِمْ فَفَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ ؕ

فَمَنْ نَكَثَ فَإِنَّمَا يَنْكُثُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ ؕ

وَمَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِمَا عَاهَدَ عَلَيْهِمْ اللَّهُ فَسَيُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

°inna alladhīna yubāyi°ūnaka °innamā yubāyi°ūna-llāh :

yadu-llāhi fawqa °āydhim ;

faman-nakathā fa °innamā yankuthu °ala nafsih :

wa man °awfa bimā °āhada °alayhu-llāha fasayutihi °ajran °aḥīmā

Those who pledge you their allegiance pledge allegiance to Allāh.

The Hand of Allāh is above their hands.

He who breaks his pledge only breaks it against his [own] ‘self’.

But as for him who fulfils the contract he has made with Allāh,

We will give him an immense reward.

(Sūratu-l-Faṭḥ 48:10)

Who

“Whoever dies without the bay<sup>°</sup>ah on his neck  
dies the death of the Jāhiliyyah!”

(Reported by Muslim in his Ṣaḥīḥ)



Whatever you may think and however you may understand the position and the office of the Kḥalifah after the death of the Prophet ﷺ it must always be understood that it was primarily political and social rather than strictly spiritual.

As Abu Bakr ؓ observed the day after he was chosen for that office at Saqifa when confronted by the Anṣar ؓ who persisted in their view that Ḥaḍrat °Alī ؓ has been specifically chosen to be the successor by the Prophet ﷺ at Ghadir Khumm, when he ؓ said:

“For whosoever I am Mawla then °Alī is his Mawla, Oh Allāh befriend those who befriend °Alī and be enemy of those who are enemies to °Alī.”

(This ḥadīth has come from Zayd ibn Arqām, S°ad bin Abi Waqqās, Buraida bin Husayb, °Ali bin °Abi Ṭālib, Abu Ayyūb al Ansari, Bara bin Azib, Abdullah Ibn Abbās, Anas bin Malik, Abu Sa°id and Abu Hurraira ؓ, The Ḥadīth of Zayd bin Arqām comes in five (different) ways!... [cited by the arch ‘wahhabi’ al-Albanī in: *Silsilatu-l-°aḥā-dith as-Ṣaḥīha*, Volume No. 4, Page No. 330, Ḥadīth Number 1750) (and also in *Sunnan Tirmidhī*, Ḥadīth # 3713, where Tirmidhī called it “Ḥasan Ṣaḥīḥ”)

When the Anṣar ؓ reminded Abu Bakr ؓ of this and many other occasions when the Prophet ﷺ had singled °Alī ؓ out as his successor he replied, “All that you have recounted is absolutely true, for I myself have seen and heard and I do still remember all those words of the Prophet ﷺ as a witness to all those occasions. But, I have also heard the Prophet ﷺ declare. We (the °Ahlu-l-Bayt ؓ) were especially chosen by Allāh ﷻ not for leadership in this world but for the leadership in the eternal life (*al-°ākhirah*/الأخـرة)” And then he (Abu Bakr ؓ) added. “Allāh ﷻ has not decreed that the Prophethood and the Kḥulafā° should remain in one house.”

Again whatever you may think or understand from either a Sunni or a Shī°a position, the stage was set at that point, and has continued to the present time, of the separation, so as to speak, of church and state, of temporal rule and spiritual dispensation in Dāru-l-°Islām.

If we leave all polemics aside and understand that human beings are human beings and that it was only under the leadership and guidance of the Prophet ﷺ that the community was truly united, spiritually and politically, and it never has been so since his ﷺ death and most likely won't be until the appearance of the Guided One, Ḥaḍrat al-Mahdi (المهدي) ﷺ, we still need to understand, aside from the socio-political ramifications, mainly having to do with the enlargement of the ʿummah and the subjection of foreign entities such as the various Arab tribes, and the Byzantines, Romans, Egyptians, Persians etc., what happened in the realm of spirituality during the roughly 25 years that the first three kḥulafāʾ held office.

In fact it was this period in which Ṭaṣawwuf, in Reality (*ḥaqiqah*/حَقِيقَةُ) if not in name, was born and came into being principally through the teaching circles and weekly orations (*kḥutabah*/خطب) of ʿImām ʿAlī ﷺ, not to mention his blessed way of life and being.

We must also note that during those roughly 25 years he ﷺ served Abu Bakr, ʿUmar and Uṭḥman ﷺ faithfully, especially in terms of the judgments he was asked by them to render, as well as the advice they sought. He never turned them down in this respect and always gave his utmost in perfect politeness (*ʿadab*/أَدَب) and respect.

Ṣūfis, counter to popular misunderstanding, are absolute realists. What might have been, could have been or should have been does not, in the end, really interest us. What does interest us is what “*IS*” or, in the case of what is past, what actually and really took place. Polemic is always a lost case and always masks a lost cause.

As Ṣūfis what we know is that precisely during those 25 years when Ḥaḍrat ʿImām ʿAlī ﷺ had a lot of time, he set the foundations for all the schools of Ṭaṣawwuf which exist today; even the Naqshbandi which traces itself back to Abu Bakr ﷺ still manages to find links to Ḥaḍrat ʿImām ʿAlī ﷺ via ʿImām Jāfar aṣ-Ṣādiq ﷺ.

Moreover, although we always see the Youths of the Garden, ʿImām Ḥasan and ʿImām Ḥusayn ﷺ, in the first line of transmission, we also almost always find Sidi Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (الحسن البصري) ﷺ who was a well-known member of the *tābiʿūn* (followers/التابعون) who were the generation of Muslims who were born after the death of the Prophet ﷺ but who were contemporaries of many of the companions (الصحابه) (*aṣ-ṣahābah*).

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī ؓ was born in 642 of Persian parents and brought up in the house of the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, Umma Salma ؓ. He met many companions of the Prophet ﷺ including seventy of the warriors who fought at Baḍr. He grew up to become one of the most prominent figures of his generation, being famous for his piety and condemnation of worldliness. When he died on Friday the 5th of Rajab 110 AH, at the age of 89, the entire population of Baṣra went to his funeral, so that the first time in the history of Baṣra the Jami Masjid of the city remained empty at the hour of the °Aṣr prayer.

He is considered to be one of the “substitutes” (°*abdāl*) referred to in the ḥadīth, “The earth will never lack forty men similar to the Friend of the Merciful (°Ibrāhīm ؑ), and through them people receive rain and are given help. None of them die except Allāh ﷻ substitutes another in his place.” Qatada said: “We do not doubt that al-Ḥasan is one of them.” (Narrated by at-Tabaranī in *al-°Awsat*)

Beyond all of that what is very important to understand is that he was not from °Ahlu-l-Bayt ؑ yet he was considered a member of the family by Ḥaḍrat °Imām °Alī ؑ in much the same way that Sidi Salmān Farsī ؓ was by the Prophet ﷺ. While some sources gather Sidi Salmān ؓ with the Muhajirūn, other sources narrate that during the Battle of the Trench, one of Muhajirūn stated “Salmān is one of us, Muhajirīn”, but this was challenged by the Muslims of Madi-nah known as the °Anṣār (helpers). A lively argument began between the two groups, each of them claiming that Salman ؓ belonged to their group, and not to the other group. The Prophet ﷺ arrived on the scene, and heard the argument, and soon put an end to all arguments saying: “Salmān ؓ is neither Muhajir nor °Anṣār. He is one of us. He is of the People of the House, °Ahlu-l-Bayt ؑ.”

This is of utmost importance because Salmān Farsī ؓ is the proof that membership in the °Ahlu-l-Bayt ؑ extends beyond blood ties, which has enormous ramifications in terms of *naṣṣ* which is how spiritual authority is transmitted from generation to generation.

It is this subject of authority to which we must return over and over again if we are to understand the subject of “who” or “who?”

As we sought to clarify earlier there are four possible routes to this authority. That of the worldly philosophers (الفلاسفة), that of the Sunnis, that of the Shī'a and, finally, that of the Ṣūfīs.

Who

Perhaps here we need to understand what is meant by authority.

Allāh ﷻ says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

yāā °ayyuha-lladhīna °āāmanū °aṭī°u-llāha wa °aṭī°u-r-rasūla  
wa °ūli-l-°amri miñkum

Oh you who believe! Obey Allāh, and obey the Messenger  
and those in authority amongst you...

(Sūratu-n-Nisā° 4:59)

The first two are relatively easy to understand but the third is much more difficult and became more so upon the death of the Prophet ﷺ.

Indeed it became crucial after his death to know exactly who were these °uli-l-°amri miñkum or “those in authority amongst you”. It is even said that the reason behind the ḥadīth regarding the division of °Islām into 73 sects was and is precipitated by misunderstanding or plain not understanding this critical °ayāt.

Among the philosophers and the scholars there are those who say that it is they who are the °uli-l-°amri by dint of their superior knowledge, especially among the °ulemā° and fuqaha°.

Indeed the well known scholar, Dr. Taha Al-Alwani, says “Those in authority among you are the scholars who are able to deduce judgments and leaders entrusted by the ummah who have authority regarding the shari°ah of Allāh and stick to it without falsification.” [Intro to *Kayfa nata °āmal ma° al Qur°ān*, Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī]

Sunnis point to the Khulafā° Rāshidūn their successors, and though truthfully it is hard to understand just who are their successors. For instance in immediate terms would one then consider Mu°awiyya to be among the °uli-l-°amri or, more pointedly, Yazīd? Certainly they are the immediate technical successors to the Khulafā° Rashidūn or how about the khulafā° in the Ottoman (*Devlet-i °Osmāniyye*) times or the Mughal or the Mamluk periods of °Islamic history?

Among the Shī°ā, on the other hand, °Imām, Ja°far ؑ made repeated unequivocal declarations concerning the nature of the °Imām.

He proclaimed in a very forthright manner that the °Imāms are the proofs (*ḥujjah/حجة*) of Allāh ﷻ on earth, their words are the words of Allāh ﷻ, and their commands are the commands of Allāh ﷻ.

“Obedience to them is obedience to Allāh ﷻ, and disobedience to them is disobedience to Allāh ﷻ.

“In all their decisions they are inspired by Allāh ﷻ, and they are in absolute authority. It is to them, therefore, that “Allāh ﷻ has ordained obedience.” (4:59).

°Imān Ja°far ؑ goes on to declare that the °Imām of the time is the witness for the people and he is the gate to Allāh ﷻ (bābullāh / باب الله) and the road (sabīl / سبيل الله) to Him, and the guide thereto (dalīl / دليل), and the repository of His knowledge, and the interpreter of His revelations. The °Imām of his time is a pillar of the unity (tawhīd / توحيد) of Allāh ﷻ. The °Imām is immune from sin (khaṭā° / خطاء) and error (dalāl / ضلال). The °Imāms are those from whom “Allāh ﷻ has removed all impurity and made them absolutely pure” (33:33); they are possessed of the power of miracles and of irrefutable arguments (dalā°il); and they are for the protection of the people of this earth just as the stars are for the inhabitants of the heavens. They may be likened, in this community, to the Ark of Nūḥ ؑ: he who boards it obtains salvation and reaches the gate of repentance.” In another tradition, “Allāh ﷻ delegated to the °Imāms spiritual rulership over the whole world, which must always have such a leader and guide. Even if only two men were left upon the face of the earth, one of them would be an °Imām, so much would his guidance be needed.”

But the present problem is that whether one is a Zaydi or an Ismā°ili or an °Iṭḥnasharī the °Imām is not accessible. All of these schools lead to or yield an °Imām who is hidden or in occultation (ghaybat).

Needless to say if one cannot be in touch with the °Imām it becomes very difficult to claim guidance from such a figure for where is the proof that one is actually in contact with the °Imām and not simply in contact with one’s own imagination or psychic projection?

Of course there are many theological and metaphysical work-arounds which have been devised or suggested over the centuries, but the bottom line remains that for the Shī°a there is no direct contact with the °Imām, which puts them into exactly the same position as the Sunnis in having to rely upon qualified scholars to get crucial answers to critical questions in this world and the next. One such workaround proposed by °Āyātullah Khomeini was the idea of the *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* (ولاية الفقيه) or the Providence or Guardianship of the Jurist.

## Who

So far, the jury is out on the efficacy of this workaround as is evident to anyone seriously contemplating the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran for, whilst such scholars and jurisprudents may have impeccable credentials and the best of intentions, they do not and cannot, at least in the terms or at the level in which we are discussing this matter, occupy the same position as the °Imām as laid out by °Imām Ja°far ؑ and referred to above.

All of this means that for the Philosophers, the Sunnis and the Shī°a there is, in the end, no real Authority to which they can turn, as we have said, to get crucial answers to critical questions.

There remains, providentially, another school of enquiry, thought or being which is the the School (*madrasah*/مدرسة) of Ṭasawwuf, and it is precisely this school which, both in its Sunni and Shī°a forms and minifestations, provides its adherents or followers with access to Incorruptible and True Authority.

Recall, if you will, what we quoted earlier from the Prophet ﷺ and Allāh ﷻ who said:

انا مدينة العلم وعلي بابها. لا أحد يدخل البيت إلا من خلال البوابة

°ana madinatu-l-°ilm wa °ali bābuhā:

lā °aḥadā yudkhila-l-bayt °illā min khilālu-l-bawābah

I am the city of knowledge and °Alī is its gate.

One does not enter the house except through its gate

وَأَتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ° وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

wa°tu-l-buyūta min °abāwābiha wa-ttaqu-llāha la°allakum tufliḥūn

So enter houses by their doors

and be aware of Allāh, so that hopefully you will be successful.

(Suratu-l-Baqarah 2:189)

Also recall that the founder and principle exponent of this school based on the practice and thought of the Prophet ﷺ was °Imām °Alī ؑ who is incontestably the °Imān ؑ *par excellence*.

Also look at the various lines of transmission (*silāsil*) by which his ؑ teaching was passed down through the generations and you will inevitably find °Imām Ḥasan and Ḥusayn ؑ and Ḥasan al-Basri ؑ. And if you look further down the first few generation you will find all of the °Imāms ؑ to Ja°far aṣ-Ṣādiq ؑ plus many distinguished members of the *salaf* (سلف) and the *at-tābbi°ūn* (التابعون) so there can be no question of heterodoxy from either the Sunni or the Shī°a side as these are incontrovertibly the best of the best.



Who

Moreover if you look at the links of transmission you find one after another of people of the highest character and learning. Do I mean to say there were never any bad apples or simple place holders? Of course not. People are people and bad apples always crop up but by and large, and especially if you look at the directors of these schools and the helmsmen of these ships of safety (*ṣafīnatu-n-najāh/ سفينة النجاة*), you will see some thirty-odd generations now of the best of the best from among the Muslim community both Sunni and Shī'a.

Accepting this as a working premise now let us look at a very crucial aspect of Sūfī thought which is wrapped up in the following āyāt from an early Makkan sūrah:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

laqadā khalaqānal-ʾinsāna fī ʾaḥṣani taqāwīm

surely We have created the human being in the best of forms  
(Sūratu-t-Ṭīn 95:4)

Looking at the āyāt consider this ḥadīth:

“There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoiled, the whole body gets spoiled – and that is the heart.” (al-Bukhārī, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 49: Part of an ḥadīth narrated by an-Nuʿman bin Bashīr)

Keeping both of those in mind, consider this authentic ḥadīth qudsī:

“Heavens and earth failed to contain Me,  
yet I was contained in the heart of a believer.”

(Musnad ʾImām Aḥmad)

Holding all of this in consciousness I want now to briefly touch on the teachings of the “Hidden ʾImām” sometimes called “The Man of Light” not as a figure of the future but as a being in the present. Not as a deferred promise but as a real presence in the here and now.

In other words I am speaking or writing here *per se* of ʾImām al-Mahdi ﷺ as an historical figure for which both Sunnis and Shī'a are waiting – albeit in different but incontrovertible ways.

Undoubtedly it is difficult for some people to get their minds around this idea just as there are some people who believe that the *jannah* and *jahannam* or the garden and the fire exist only in the future and do not understand that both exist in the present as attested to in such Qurʾānic āyāt as:

Who

فَضْرَبَ بَيْنَهُمْ سُورًا لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ

fa-ḍuriba baynahum bi-sūril-lāhu bābūm-

bāṭinuhu fīhi-r-raḥmatu wa ḍhāhiruhu min qibalihi-l-adhābā

and a wall shall be set up between them in which is a gate  
on the inside of it — mercy — and on the outside of it — suffering.  
(Sūrah al-Ḥadīd 57:13)

and

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ  
ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً  
فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي – وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

yā ā ʾayyuha-n-nafsu-l-muṭmaʾinnah •  
ʾirjiʿī ʾila rabbika rāḍiyatam-marḍiyyah •  
fa-d-khulī fī ʾibādī – wa-dā-khulī jannatī

“Oh you whose self (*nafs*) is tranquil.  
return to your Lord pleased and well pleasing.  
Enter with My servants – enter My Garden.”  
(Sūrah al-Fajr 89:22-30)

In these two ʾāyāt, Allāh ﷻ in one case tells us that there is a wall in this world in which there is a gate separating the world of suffering from the world of bliss; and in the ʾāyāt from Sūratu-l-Fajr, The command, “Enter with My servants – enter My Garden” is, in accord with Arabic grammar, in the present and immediate now and not in some distant future, though that is not excluded.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, just as The Garden and the Fire exist here in the present, so does the Hidden ʾImām, and again that is who I am referring to rather than the historical and meta-historical ʾImām al-Mahdi ﷺ for whom we all, especially in light of the present suffering in the world, are avidly awaiting and actively anticipating. In writing or speaking about this subject at all I acknowledge my huge debt in understanding as a result of my reading and contemplation over forty some years the writings of Henri Corbin, without whom I can’t quite see how I would have ever even entered or been aware of many of these dimensions of thought.

1. See our essay: “*The Dhāhir and the Bāṭin*”, Noor Hierographers, 2010

## Who

My first introduction to his writing took place in the early 1970's when I was working and living in the shadow of Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace and beginning my reading of Henri Corbin in French (haltingly) with my dear friend Abdu-l-Latif Salazar.



I distinctly remember reading a passage in which Corbin was writing about the subtle centers (*laṭā'if*/لطائف) in the teaching of Alā Dawlah as-Semnānī ؒ where he says, “As the hidden meanings gradually come to be understood, the organs of the subtle physiology receive energies from universes preceding the sensory universe; these unite with the organs of the “body of immortality” which are at the core of the mystic’s person much more so than “the stars of his fate” since they are truly the “prophets of his being”.

“At this mystical stage, having reached the perfect spiritual stature, the mystic no longer needs to meditate on the ultimate *laṭīfa* since from then on he *is* the ‘Muḥammad of his being’”. Corbin then goes on to quote Najmu-l-Kubra ؒ, “Just as the physical sense of hearing is a necessary condition if the hearer is to understand the exoteric meaning of the Qur’ān and receive the tafsīr from his outer visible master so the integrity of the heart, of the inner hearing is a necessary condition if the inspired spiritual seeker is to understand the esoteric meaning of the Qur’ān and receive the *ṭa’wīl* (تأويل)<sup>2</sup> of his inner supresensory master and guide.”

Thus pointing to the required state of being one must attain if one is to be able to both hear and contain these inner teachings.

2. “The word *tā’wīl* (تأويل) is derived from the same root as the word *awwal* (first), which is also a Name of Allāh ﷻ. The word *ta’wīl* means to return, to cause to return, to reduce to, to find that to which a thing can be reduced.

## Who

Since Allāh ﷻ is the First in relation to all things, many authorities understand the term *ta'wīl* to signify taking a thing back to the Originas or the First, demonstrating a thing's relationship with the First, tying or takings things back to Allāh ﷻ. It is said *awallah 'alayka zalutak* means may Allāh ﷻ cause it to return to you. The word *ta'wīl* is used 18 times in the Qur'ān.

Its verb *ṭa'awwala* originally means to apply a verse to a given situation. *Ta'wīl* also means the final end (*aqibah*) of a matter, as Allāh ﷻ says: “On a day when its (the Qur'ān) *ṭa'wīl* (fulfillment) shall come.” (7:53, also refer 10:39). Zamakṣḥari defines *ta'wīl* as the act of “referring a verse back to whatever meanings it can bear”.

*Ta'wīl* is a science of elucidating the general as well as particular meaning of the Qur'ānic words. Muqatil bin Suliman (d. 150/767) relates the Prophet ﷺ as saying:

“He who recites the Qur'ān and does not know the *ta'wīl* of it is an illiterate” (*Tafsīr Kḥamsa Mi'at 'Āyāt*, 1:26).

Thus, the *ta'wīl* is an act of referring a verse back to its root meaning. The hidden treasure locked in the literal words of the Qur'ān, being filled with unfathomable truth and unutterable mysteries, and it is only the agency of *ta'wīl* to fathom the truth.

The Arabic word *ta'wīl* contains etymologically the meaning of the process involved. It means literally to take something back to its beginning or origin.

To penetrate into the inner mysteries of the Qur'ān is precisely to reach back to its origin because the Qur'ān is the most inward and deepest of texts, and the revelation or manifestation of the sacred text is at once a descent and an exteriorization of it.

Everything actually comes from within to the outside, from the inner (*bāṭin*) to the outer (*ḍḥahir*) and we who live “in the outer” must in turn return to the interior if we are to reach the origins of our being.

The *ṭa'wīl* is thus to go from the *ḍḥahir* to the *bāṭin*.

The idea of penetrating into the inner meaning of things is to be seen everywhere in 'Islām. To demonstrate the traditional basis of this important doctrine consider this 'āyat from Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān:

Who

وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَاوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۗ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ  
يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِكُلِّ مِمَّا عِنْدَ رَبِّنَا  
وَمَا يَذْكُرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

wa mā ya<sup>°</sup>lamu tā<sup>°</sup>wīlahu illa-llāhu wa-r-rasikhūna fi-l-<sup>°</sup>ilm :  
yaqūlūna <sup>°</sup>āmannā bihi kullum-min <sup>°</sup>indī rabbina  
wa mā yadhḥakkaru <sup>°</sup>illa <sup>°</sup>ūlu-l-<sup>°</sup>albābā

And who can know how to trace back (the Signs) save Allāh  
and those who are deeply rooted in knowledge.

They say, “We believe in it – all of it is from our Lord.”

Yet no one remembers save those who understand.

(Sūratu <sup>°</sup>Āl <sup>°</sup>Imrān 3:7)

This <sup>°</sup>āyāt has prompted a lot of discussion among the mufasssirūn including those who say none knows its *Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* except Allāh ﷻ.

They say that *Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* is of four types:

*Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* that the Arabs know in their language;

*Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* that no one is excused of being ignorant of;

*Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* that the scholars know; and

*Ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* that only Allāh ﷻ knows."

Scholars of Qur<sup>°</sup>ānic recitation also have different opinions about pausing at the Name of Allāh ﷻ in this <sup>°</sup>āyāt. This stop was reported from <sup>°</sup>A<sup>°</sup>ishā, Urwah, Abu ash-Sha<sup>°</sup>ṭḥa' and Abu Nahik ؓ.

Some pause after reciting, وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ (And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge), saying that Allāh ﷻ in Qur<sup>°</sup>ān does not address the people with what they cannot understand.

Ibn Abi Najih ؓ said that Mujāhid ؓ said that Ibn Abbās ؓ said, “I am among those firmly grounded in its *ta<sup>°</sup>wīl* (interpretation).”

The Prophet ﷺ supplicated for the benefit of Ibn Abbas ؓ,

اللَّهُمَّ فَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ وَعَلِّمْهُ التَّوِيلَ

Allāhuma faqqihhu fi-d-dīni wa <sup>°</sup>allimhu-t-ta<sup>°</sup>wīl

Oh Allāh!

Bestow on him knowledge in the religion  
and teach him the *tā<sup>°</sup>wīl* (inner meaning).

Who

Ta'wīl has two meanings in the Qur'ān: the true reality of things, and what they will turn out to be.

For instance, Allāh ﷻ said,

وَقَالَ بَابِتْ هَذَا تَأْوِيلُ رُؤْيِي مِنْ قَبْلُ

wa qala yā 'abati hadha ta'wīlu ru'yaya min qabl

And he said:

“O my father! This is the *ta'wīl* of my dream from before”

(Sūrah Yūsuf 12:100)

and Allāh ﷻ says,

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ

hal yandhurūna 'illā ta'wīlahu yawma ya'tī ta'wīluh

Do they wait just for it's ta'wīl

On the Day [of Resurrection] it's ta'wīl is finally fulfilled.

(Sūratu-l-ʿĀrāf 7:53)

refers to the true reality of Resurrection that they were told about.

If this is the meaning desired in the āyāt above (3:7) then pausing after reciting Name of Allāh ﷻ is warranted, because only Allāh ﷻ knows the true reality of things.

In this case the statement of Allāh ﷻ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ (And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge) is connected to His statement, يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ (say: "We believe in it").

If the word *ta'wīl* means the second meaning, that is, explaining and describing, such as what Allāh ﷻ said, نَبِّئْنَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ ((They said): “Inform us of the *ta'wīl* of this”), (12:36) meaning its explanation, then pausing after reciting, وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ (And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge) is warranted. This is because the scholars have general knowledge in, and understand what they were addressed with, even though they do not have knowledge of the true reality of things. Therefore, the statement, يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ of Allāh ﷻ (say: "We believe in it") describes the conduct of the scholars.

Allāh ﷻ says in the āyāt,

وَمَا يَذْكُرُوا إِلَّا أُولَ الْأَلْبَابِ

wa mā yadhdkkaru 'illa 'ūlu-l-'albābā

“Yet no one remembers save those who understand.”

or those who have good minds and sound comprehension, understand, contemplate and comprehend the meaning in the correct way.

Who

Ibn al-Mundhīr says in his tafsīr:

“Those firmly grounded in knowledge are those who are modest for the sake of Allāh ﷻ, humbly seek His pleasure, and do not exaggerate regarding those above them, or belittle those below them.”

Allāh ﷻ said that they supplicate to their Lord in the °āyāt that follows the one we are discussing,

... رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا

rabbana lā tuzigh qulūbanā ba°da idh hadaytanā

Our Lord!

Let not our hearts deviate (from the truth) after You have guided us. meaning, “Do not let our hearts deviate from the guidance after You allowed them to acquire it. Do not make us like those who have wickedness in their hearts, those who follow the allegorical (*mutashābihāt*/مُتَشَابِهَات) in the Qur°ān to make *fitnah*. Rather, make us remain firmly on Your straight path and true religion.

... وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ...

wahabā lana mini ladunka

And grant us from Your presence,

... رَحْمَةً ...

rahmah

Universal Mercy

and in the following °āyah Allāh ﷻ continues

إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

°innaka °aanta-l-wahābā

Truly, You are the Bestower.

Ibn Abi Ḥatim and Ibn Jarīr رحمه recorded that Umm Saamah رضي said that the Prophet ﷺ then used to supplicate,

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

yā muqlliba-l-qulūbā ṭhabbitā °ala dīnak

O You Who changes the hearts,  
make my heart firm on Your religion.

Sahl at-Ṭustarī (الطوسطري) رحمه in his Tafsīr mentions that °Imām °Alī رضي said of the words in °āyāt 3:7: “And those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*ar-rāsikhūna fī-l-°ilm*/الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ) meant:

Who

“[Those rooted in knowledge] are the ones whom knowledge has protected from plunging [into the interpretation of the Qur’ān] according to some whim (*hawā*) or with set arguments (*hujaj maḍrūba*) without [awareness of] the unseen [mysteries] (*ghuyūb*).’

[This is] due to the guidance of Allāh ﷻ upon them, and His disclosing to them His unseen secrets from within the treasure chests of knowledge. Thus they said, We believe in the Book; all of it is from our Lord [3:7]. So Allāh, Exalted is He, acknowledged them [in this verse], and made them among the people of profound and far-reaching knowledge, as an increase granted to them from Him. Just as Allāh ﷻ has said, Exalted is He, But say: ‘O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge [20:114]’”

رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

rabbi zidnī ‘ilmā

Knowledge or ‘ilm is the fulcrum on which the two worlds, that of the ḍahīr and that of the bāṭin, are suspended and attempts to maintain an equilibrium between them. If the bāṭin gives direction and meaning to the ḍahīr, the ḍahīr constitutes in turn the basis and indispensable support for the bāṭin. “Without esotericism, exotericism loses its meaning and without exotericism, esotericism finds itself stripped of its foundation.”

Here we are in a world of polarities characterised by the theory of opposites. The inner and the outer, light and dark, guidance and mis-guidance, the majority and the minority, the masses and the elite, the ‘amm and the khaṣṣ.

This all extends from the various tensions and effects that derive from the origins of our way in which the legislator Prophet ﷺ brings to the people a Sacred Revelation which has come from Allāh ﷻ, descended from heaven and the ‘Imām ﷺ who initiates a small elite into the inner meanings of that Sacred Revelation and by so doing returns ( *ta’wīl* ) it to its heavenly and Divine origins.

All the pairs or polarities can be understood as a continuation of the fundamental pair of ḍahīr and bāṭin, with the center of gravity being “knowledge”, for once sides are taken then the balance is lost, struggles ensue, fiṭnah spreads, polarity reigns and you are left with a blinkered mass tending to superficial ignorance and a minority slowly and inevitably tending to the outré, arcane and heterodox.



## Who

When knowledge or ʿilm can be maintained then there is a balance between the inner and the outer, the ḍahir and the bāṭin and the various other polarities.

But we know from long and sad experience, indeed from the very beginnings of things, that this is not the situation which applies.

For instance, visit an average ḍahiri Muslim household and you will find a dearth of books about ʾIslam or anything else. The Qurʾān will be present of course but you won't find many marks of wear and if it does fall open it will be to Sūrah Yā Sīn which is used in time of peril or death. Perhaps you will see a perfectly matched gift edition of Saḥīḥ Bukhārī or Saḥīḥ Muslim gathering dust and clearly scarcely used or consulted. Adult religious education, if there any at all, derives from a weekly khutbah or *waz* (*bayān*) of maybe half an hour and an occasional “religious” CD or DVD or maybe watching Q-TV on occasion or, in this generation, watching Zakir Naik on TV just as their parents before them watched Ahmed Deedat.

On the other hand there are those who live besieged by the jinn and convinced that someone is doing *jādoo* or the black eye on them and seeking *taveez* from one shaykh or another whilst digging through the *Kitāb Shamsu-l-Maʿārif* (كتاب شمس المعارف) of Shaykh Aḥmad bin ʿAlī Al-Bunī searching for magic squares, and the combination of numbers that they believe will help them to communicate with various jinn, angels and spirits and, very often, dismissing those who attend prayers at the maṣjid as ignorant and backward while at the same time themselves lax in their own practice of the dīn.

Admittedly I have painted both of these groups with a rather broad brush and passed over many subtleties on both sides but I have done this to make my point regarding the loss of balance in the ʾummah around the tipping point of ʾilm – inner and outer.

Moreover you cannot really cast this state of affairs as conflict between the outer and the inner, or it is much more between the horizontal and the vertical in the sense that both sides of what I have described above result from a pursuit of horizontal knowledge or a kind of spiritual materialism rather than any deep pursuit of that ʾaḥsani taqāwīm or the pursuit of the perfect form that I touched on at the beginning of this talk or essay.

And it is this quest for the perfection of our beings that is critical.

Da<sup>°</sup>wah (دعوة) in our time usually denotes the preaching of <sup>°</sup>Islam. Da<sup>°</sup>wah literally means “issuing a summons” or “making an invitation”, and is the active participle of a verb meaning variously “to summon” or “invite” whose triconsonantal root is (d<sup>°</sup>a i/ د ع ي). A Muslim who practices da<sup>°</sup>wah, either as a religious worker or in a volunteer community effort, is called a *dā<sup>°</sup>i*. A *dā<sup>°</sup>i* is thus a person who invites people to understand <sup>°</sup>Islām through a dialogical process, and may be categorized in some cases as the <sup>°</sup>Islāmic equivalent of a missionary, as one who invites people to the faith, to the prayer, or to an Islamic way of life.

But this is exactly an horizontal understanding of this term or activity and avoids or obfuscates or is unaware of other dimensions of this term especially as it was understood during the Fatimid Dynasty.

The Faṭimid <sup>°</sup>Islāmic Caliphate or al-Fāṭimiyyūn (الفاطميون) was a Shī<sup>°</sup>a <sup>°</sup>Isma<sup>°</sup>ili Muslim k̥hilāfah that existed from 909 to 1171 and spanned a vast area of the Arab World, from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. Originally based in Tunisia, the Fatimid dynasty extended their rule across the Mediterranean coast of Africa, and ultimately made Egypt, where they both founded the city of Cairo (*al-Qāhirah*/القاهرة) and, arguably, the oldest university in the world, al-Azhar, which they made the centre of their k̥hilāfāh. At its height, in addition to Egypt, the caliphate included varying areas of the Maḡrib, Sudan, Sicily, the Levant, and Hijaz.

Since history is always written by the victors, you will find great difficulty in gaining any unbiased information about what happened under their rule which, if you do the math, lasted for more than 250 years which is longer than the entire history of the United States and we all know how much “history” and bios, movies, TV shows etc. that the brief existence of the USA has generated.

I don’t intend to go into that history but I will tell the reader or listener if you persevere you *can* find relatively unbiased material on this almost hidden period of time in Muslim history which is usually mainly given over to the struggles between the Ummayyads and the Abbasids, the coming of the Seljuk Turks and the rise of Kurdish power culminating in the regin of Ṣalaḥu-d-Dīn <sup>°</sup>Ayyubī.

You will find all of that well documented but you will have to search hard to find unbiased material relating to the Faṭimids despite their controlling most of the then Muslim world for 250 years.

## Who

What, in the context of this essay or talk, is of importance and what I wish to draw your attention to is their idea of *da‘wah* and who or what they consider a *da‘ī* to be.

In essence they considered the *da‘wah* to be a call for people to return to their perfect original form or, as Allāh ﷻ calls it, their *‘aḥsan taqāwīm* or best of forms. A *da‘ī*, from their perspective, was one who called people to the *‘aḥsan taqāwīm*. From a Ṣūfī perspective, this is a very important understanding that is almost completely at odds with the horizontal understanding of *da‘wah* in the present time, which runs along the lines imagined by the Jam‘at Tabligh or various paid or volunteer groups out of Sa‘udi Arabia of the Gulf and, in general with a Wahhabi or Ikḥwānī outlook.

For starts note the relationship between *‘iḥsān* and *‘aḥsan*.

*‘Iḥsān* of course being the third dimension of *‘Islām*, based on the Ḥadīth from Sayyidina Jibrīl ﷺ narrated by both Bukḥarī and Muslim which defines al-*‘Iḥsān* as, “Worshipping Allāh as though you saw Him knowing if you do not see Him yet He sees you.

If you will refer back to my last essay on “Why” done for this series of talks and meetings, you will note that I referred to ten different dimensions of *‘Islām* and briefly explicated seven of them.

1. *‘Islām* or submission
2. *‘Imān* or belief
3. *‘Iḥsān* or excellence
4. *Taqwah* or consciousness
5. *Fanā‘* or annihilation
6. *Baqā‘* or subsistence
7. *‘Iqān* or certainty

With this in mind let us look again at the *‘āyāt* in question.

Allāh ﷻ says,

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ • ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ  
laqaḍā kḥalaqāna-l-‘insāna fī ‘aḥsani taqāwīm •  
thumma radadnāhu ‘asfala sāfilīn

We created the human in the best of forms  
Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low.

(Sūratu-ṭ-Ṭīn 94:4-5)

Who

What is so crucial in the above ʾāyāt is the phrase:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

laqadā khalāqāna-l-ʾinsāna fī ʾaḥsani taqāwīm

*We created the human in the best of forms*

Here Allāh ﷻ is swearing a deep oath on Himself ﷻ that all of us human beings were created in the best of forms. When Allāh ﷻ swears in this way you accept whole heartedly and draw into your heart the Truth of what He ﷻ says.

Allāh ﷻ is telling us that we were created without flaw, with a pure soul imbued with *fiṭrah*, a powerful mind, and a body whose subtleties are still not understood by modern science. Allāh ﷻ is telling us that we are perfectly capable of fulfilling every obligation; of bearing any burden; and of achieving every noble dream.

But that affirming oath is immediately followed by:

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ

ṭhumma radadnāhu ʾasfala sāfilīn

Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low.

(Sūratu-ṭ-Ṭīn 94:4-5)

And herein exactly in the “Why?” of ṭaṣawwuf and the necessity for sufism, because after having been created in the best of forms, the highest *fiṭrah*, suddenly there is a fall to the lowest of the low.

And there rises the problem, the riddle of how to return, as it were, to that best of forms in which Allāh ﷻ has created us, and that “how” is one of the motivating factors behind ṭaṣawwuf or ṣufism.

How can we regain our perfect original being?

or


How do we return to what we were before we were?

Buiding on the last talk, which explained the *why* of things now we have to understand the *who*. As we said at the very beginning, there must always be *a* teacher but as we have seen the secular, the Sunni or the Shiʿa teachers and teachings are all limited because they are not in touch with an unassailable authority.

We need the unlimited teacher and that is the teacher who is in touch with the inner or hidden ʾimām, the “man of light” within, for that teachers is the only real authority in a world of shifting sands.

Inasmuch as we have spoken again about the seven dimensions of ʾIslam we can also speak about the seven prophets of ʾIslam both in their outer and inner appearances, though we shall concentrate upon the inner appearances or what is called the prophets of your being<sup>3</sup>.

1. The ʾĀdam of your being or the lāṭifa qalabīya or the mold
2. The Nuḥ of your being or the laṭifa nafsīya
3. The ʾIbrahīm of your being or the laṭifa anāʾīya
4. The Mūsā of your being or the laṭifa sirrīya
5. The Daud of your being or the laṭifa rūḥīya
6. The ʾIsā of your being or the laṭifa khafīya
7. The Muḥammad of your being or the laṭifa ḥaqīqiya

Corbin says of this in reference to the Tafsīr of as-Semnānī , “The law of correspondences that governs hermeneutics and which is none other than the law governing spiritual interpretations, can be stated as follows: there is a homology between the events taking place in the outer world and the inner events of the soul; there is homology between what Samnānī calls *zamān ʾafāqi* or the time of the horizons which is the physical time of historical computation governed by the movement of the visible stars, and the *zamān ʾanfūsi*, or psychic time which is the time of the world of the soul, of the pole (*quṭb*) star governing the inner Heavens.

“This is exactly why each outer fact can be led back (*taʾwīl*) to the inner “region” to which it corresponds. That *region* is one of the series of spiritual organs (*laṭāʾif*) of mystical physiology, each of which, due to the homology of times, is the typification of a prophet in the human microcosm, whose image and role it assumes.

“Thus the growth of the subtle organism, the physiology of the man of light, progresses through these seven laṭāʾif, each of which is one of the seven prophets of *your* being: the cycle of birth and initiatic growth is homologous to the cycle of prophecy. The mystic is aware of this growth thanks to the aperception of the colored lights which characterize each center, ʾAdam being smoke grey, Nuḥ being blue, ʾIbrahīm being red, Mūsā being white, Daud being yellow, ʾIsā being a luminous black and Mūhammad a brilliant emerald green.”

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3. Please see page 234, figure 17 of *Orisons of the Shādhīdhulī*, Noon Heirographers, Second Edition, Singapore, Shaʿban 2005, for charts of the above.

Who

So when we talk about *da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* and who is the *da<sup>ʿ</sup>ī* this type of talk is, obviously, not what you will hear or get from the Jam<sup>ʿ</sup> at Tabligh or the local representative of WAMY, MSA or Rabita-l-<sup>ʿ</sup>Islāmi.

The *da<sup>ʿ</sup>ī* in this case is the one who has already made at least one round trip of the journey and the *da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* is the call to each one who can hear it to make the journey back to their original being for, remember and remember well, that is was Muḥammad ﷺ who said, “*kuntu nabiyyan wa adamu bayni-l-ma’i wa-t-tin*” – “I was a Prophet when <sup>ʿ</sup>Ādam was between water and clay.”

What is of course crucial in this matter is that the person who is making the call is making it first of all with the permission of Allāh ﷻ and not out of their own desires.

وَدَاعِيَ إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ

wa dā<sup>ʿ</sup>īyan<sup>ʿ</sup> ila-llāhi bi-<sup>ʿ</sup>idhnihi

and call to Allāh by His Permission

(Sūratu-l-<sup>ʿ</sup>Aḥzab 33:46)

and that they themselves must have, at the very least, completed at least one round trip in the journey, which is to say they are a “man of light” in contact with the hidden <sup>ʿ</sup>imām of their being.

You might wonder why we say “at least one round trip”.

This journey in one that requires, in addition to the presence of the <sup>ʿ</sup>ilm upon which rests firm knowledge of *ḍḥahir* and the *bāṭin* – the outer and the inner – both perpetual combat and continuous initiation on the part of the way goer.

Perpetual combat in the sense of the heart of the believer that has been thoroughly tested in accord with the saying of Haḍrat <sup>ʿ</sup>Ali ؑ,

“Our teaching is difficult, particularly arduous, exasperating, distressing. Offer it to people in small quantities. To those who acknowledge it, tell more, but avoid telling more to the one who denies it, because those who can bear this teaching are only an angel drawn close (المُقَرَّبِينَ), a messenger prophet or faithful believer whose heart has been tested by Allāh for the faith.”

Again in another place he ؑ says, “Indeed our work is severe and intense. It cannot be withstood save by a faithful believer whose heart has been tried by Allāh. None can comprehend our talk except trustworthy hearts and those with a serious temperament.”

## Who

And Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq said, “Even a Prophet among the Prophets may be tested with thirst till he dies thirsty; even a Prophet among the Prophets may be tested at a deserted place till he dies naked and alone; even a Prophet among the Prophets may be tested with diseases and illness till he dies of disease; even a Prophet among the Prophets may come to his people, stay with them to enjoin upon them the obedience of Allāh ﷻ, and call them to the absolute unity of Allāh ﷻ, and yet he may not be spared for a night nor given an opportunity to complete his speech nor even be given patient listening before he is killed. Certainly, Allāh, Most High, tests his servants according to His ﷻ estimate of their station.”

All of this meaning that the journey is not a one time trip and not only an ongoing one but one which often recycles based on differing circumstances and opportunities.

The one who has returned to his *ʾaḥsan taqwīm* may be called upon or even, driven or compelled, to do so many times and in many ways and circumstances.

But he must have made the journey at least once to be considered reliable for the one seeking guidance.

Here the question may arise as to how one knows that a particular person has made the journey? Where is the proof – the ḥujjah (حجة)?

First of all the proof is not extrinsic.

In other words there is no use looking for it in all the wrong places.

The very nature of the claims of the one who has returned to the Perfect Self of Allāh's ﷻ creation and has established contact with the ʾImām of his own being are their own proof.

The one making the claim offers himself as the proof in his very being and for lack of any other claimant. In the sense that anyone might ask, “What is the proof that Muḥammad ﷺ is the Prophet?”

There is no proof *but* his being. He is who he says he is.

Of course there were those who claimed to be prophets in the time of the Prophet such as Musaylimah al-Kadhāb (the liar/الكذاب) but one simply has to ask where Musaylimah al-Kadhāb is today.

Nowhere we know but most probably in the Jahannam.

Why?

Because he was obviously not a prophet but was manifestly a liar.

## Who

One does not penetrate into the Sacred World by housebreaking.

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ died to this world almost 1400 years ago. Of course at another level he ﷺ is totally and completely alive but not at the level you can go and ask, as for instance his companions ﷺ did, a direct question. So in that sense he ﷺ is dead.

Our problem arises when we need answers to questions or definitive statements regarding current events or affairs, personal or communal. Who can give us the answer?

The ‘ulemā’ and the fuqahā’ can give us answers based upon Qur’ān and the past conditions and precedents in the *sunnah* or on the basis of *ray’a* and *qiyās* but there is no true unanimity in their answers. For example Ibn ‘Arabi ﷺ and Ibn Taymiyya existed in roughly the same time frame but they certainly had very different views on the same subjects. ‘Imām Mālik and ‘Imām Abu Ḥanifa ﷺ existed in the same time frame as well yet we have two different madhḥābs with often differing views on common subjects. So where and to whom can you turn when you really need an answer?

Only to the one who has completed the journey within in his (or possibly, her) own being and is in touch with the Source from which all true answers spring.

Abū Ḥasan ash-Shadhḥulī ﷺ refers to this in his saying, “Allāh ﷻ illuminates the soul with the light of original intellect in the midst of the lights of mystical certainty.” though the eleventh-century mystic al-Hujwīrī ﷺ, ever concerned with exactitude, makes a subtle distinction between the light of illumination and the fire that may cast that light saying: “There is a difference between one who is burned by His Majesty in the fire of love and one who is illuminated by His beauty in the light of contemplation.” (*Kashf al-Maḥjūb*). He calls this the state of *zawā’id* marking “the excess of light or spiritual illumination in the heart.”

So, again, in the pursuit of “who” it is of the utmost necessity that one find a being “who” who has completed, as we have said, at least one complete round trip and is in contact with the man of light within, the true ‘imam, the spirit of guidance and incontrovertible source of truth. No one or anything or anyone else will do.

And, again, the proof is not to be found by looking for something but the proof is solely in the being of who is standing before you.



## Who

As the one who has realised the °ahṣani taqāwīm and come into contact with the hidden imam dwelling within and is, peforce, a bearer of the Divine Light (*an-nūr*/النور) and has become a caller (*da°ī*) in turn that light passes from the caller to the one who is called and responds and in turn makes the journey, for all these beings are one in essence just as there is only one light

نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ

nūrun °ala nūr :

yahdi-llāhu li nūrihi mañy-yashā°

light upon light

Allāh guides to His Light whomever He wishes.

(Sūratu-n-Nur 24:35)

In this way, the real nature of the hidden °Imām is understood as both being beyond the world of time and space and simultaneously, in the form of the realised shaykh or spiritual initiator, being *in* time and space, for it is the °Imām in Truth (*ḥaqīqqah*) who is the only true and real spiritual initiator who can provide spiritual guidance to each one who responds to the call, inner and outer, however, wherever and whenever that call is made or heard, be it in the north or the south, the west or the east and be the caller black, brown, white, yellow or red and the call be made or heard in this language or that.

Building on an earlier °āyāt, Allāh ﷻ says of that caller (*da°ī*),

وَدَاعِيَ إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

wa dā°iyan° ila-llāhi bi-°idhnihi wa sirājam-munīrā

and call to Allāh by His Permission *and a shining light*

(Sūratu-l-°Aḥzab 33:46)

at-Tustarī in explaining °Āyātu-n-Nūr (24:35) says that when Allāh ﷻ willed to create Muḥammad ﷺ, He made appear a light from out of His light and when that Light reached the Veil of Majesty (*hijābu-l °aḍḥamah*), it bowed in prostration before Allāh ﷻ who created from its prostration a mighty crystal glass column of light (*°amūdu-n-nūr*/عمود النور), that was outwardly and inwardly translucent. In Sūratu-n-Najm (sura 53) we see the Prophet ﷺ standing in that same “Column of Light”, his face radiating with the light of prophecy kindled from a sacred tree called The Lote-Tree of the Furthest Boundary (*as-sidrata-l-muntāha*/السِدْرَةُ الْمُتْنَهَى).

The Prophet ﷺ himself used to supplicate Allāh ﷻ by saying; “Oh Allāh, place light in my heart, and light in my soul, light upon my tongue, light in my ears. Place light to my right and light to my left, light behind me and light before me, light above me and light beneath me. Place light in my nerves and light in my flesh, light in my blood, light in my hair and light in my skin! Give me light, increase my light and make me light!”

‘Alī ؑ, in speaking to one of his closest students, said, “Oh Kumayl! remember well what I now tell you. There are three types of people: the spiritual initiator (*‘alim rabbanī*), the initiated seeker preceeding along the way of safety (*mua‘alim ‘alā sabīlu-n-najāt*) and stupid vile beings (*hamaj ra‘ā’*) who obey any appeal and are carried off by every wind. These latter are not illuminated by the light of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and do not lean on any firm pillar.

“Knowledge has greater value than wealth (*māl*). It is knowledge that watches over you just as you watch over your material possessions. Wealth diminishes as it is spent but knowledge increases as it is spent...the treasure of material goods perishes while the sages live lives that last as long as time endures. Their bodies disappear, but others, who resemble them in their hearts, take their places.”

Here Ḥadrat ‘Alī ؑ pointed to his heart, “There is an abundance of knowledge here. If only I could find men to carry it. Sometimes I meet someone who is perceptive enough but I cannot confide in him because he turns the *dīn* into a means of serving his worldly aims, utilising the proofs of Allāh ﷻ and His favors to dominate the weak. Sometimes I meet someone who obeys but lacks inner vision (*baṣīrah*) and falls into doubt at the first sign of difficulty. Neither the one nor the other are worthy of my trust or my knowledge. Must then our knowledge thus disappear? No! The world will never be left without one who speaks for Allāh ﷻ and safeguards His words, be he known or hidden. It is thanks to such men that the revelation and its meaning have not been destroyed. How many are they? Where are they? Their number is small but their rank is lofty. It is through them that Allāh ﷻ safeguards His witnesses until they transmit the Truth to others who resemble them. They set in motion the joy of certainty and make easy what the indulgent find hard. They are in this world in bodies in which their souls exist in the highest realms. These are the true *khulafāh* who call the people to Allāh ﷻ! Oh how I yearn to see them.”

*wa-llahu ‘alim*

Who



*I realised when I had “finished” this essay the night before I was due to present it that back on page fifteen I wrote:*

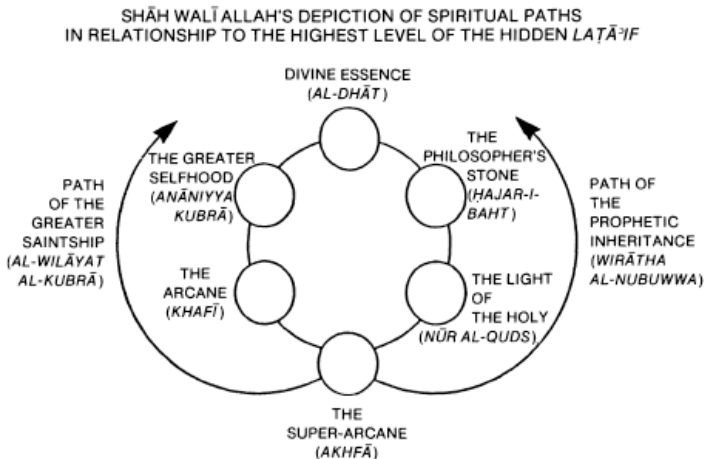
“Holding all of this in consciousness I want now to briefly touch on the teachings of the “Hidden ʿImām” sometimes called “The Man of Light” not as a figure of the future but as a being in the present. Not as a deferred promise but as a real presence in the here and now.”

*and then I got so busy writing about other dimensions of the basic proposition that I didn’t get to really go very deeply into the subject of the “Hidden ʿImām” and the “Man of Light”.*

*Unfortunately I am working under a deadline (see above) as this essay has to be delivered tomorrow but rather than shortchange the reader I have decided to “cut and paste” some pages from Corbin’s book on “The Man of Light” so at least the reader will have a ‘taste’ of what I intended.*

*The book itself, “The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism” is readily available and inexpensive and I would strongly suggest that the reader acquire a copy either from a library or by purchasing it as it contains a wealth of very illuminating material.*

*I apologise to the reader but perhaps the next few pages will at least whet your appetite and inspire you to read more, ʿinshāʾa-llāh.*



## 2. The Doctrine of Photisms according to Najm Rāzī (1256)

Najm Rāzī,<sup>109</sup> direct disciple of Najm Kobrā, is the author of a mystical treatise in Persian still in current use today in Iranian Sufism, wherein the chapters particularly related to our subject deal with visionary apperceptions (*moshāhadāt*) and the unveilings of the suprasensory (*mokāshafāt*).<sup>110</sup> Their *leitmotiv* makes the distinction between the theophanies or apparitions of divine lights which are those of the "Lights of Majesty" and the theophanies which are those of the "Lights of Beauty." Majesty (i.e. rigor, inaccessible sublimity) and Beauty (fascination, attraction, graciousness): these are the two great categories of attributes which refer respectively to the divine Being as *Deus absconditus* and as *Deus revelatus*, Beauty being the supreme theophany, divine self-revelation.<sup>111</sup> In fact they are inseparable and there is a constant interplay between the inaccessible Majesty of Beauty and the fascinating Beauty of inaccessible Majesty. The interplay is even such that Najm Kobrā, when principles, perceives a transference corresponding to a mutual exchange of the masculine and feminine attributes (§4). And to suggest that their twofoldness is necessary for the spiritual individuality to be born, he quotes this saying of the Sufi Abū-Bakr Wāsitī: "The attribute of Majesty and the attribute of Beauty intermingle; from their union the Spirit is born. The son is an allusion to partial reality; the father and mother an allusion to total reality." (§65). According to Najm Rāzī, photisms, pure lights and colored lights, refer to the attributes of Beauty; the "black light" refers to the attributes of Majesty. He outlines the "physiology of the man of light" concurrently with the theory of the "unveilings of the suprasensory world."

First of all, as a general rule, the capacity to perceive suprasensory lights is proportionate to the degree of polishing, chiefly the work of the *dhikr*, which brings the heart to the state of perfect mirror. In the beginning these lights are manifested as ephemeral flashes. The more perfect the transparency (the "specularity") of the mirror, the more they grow, the longer they last, the more diverse they become, until they manifest the

form of heavenly entities. As a general rule also, the source where these Lights take shape is the spiritual entity of the mystic, his *rūhānīyat*, the very same, as we have seen (*supra* II, 1), in Sohrawardī and the Hermetists under the name of Perfect Nature, the philosopher's "Angel." But besides this we have to take into consideration that every spiritual state, every function, every feeling, every act, has its spiritual entity, its "Angel" which manifests itself in the light proper to it. Prophecy (*nobowwat*), Initiation (*walāyat*), the spirits of the Initiates (*Awliyā*), the great shaykhs of Sufism, the Qorān, the profession of Islam, the fidelity of faith (*īmān*),<sup>112</sup> even every form of *dhikr*, every form of divine office and worship, each one of these realities is expressed in a light proper to it.

In the description given by our author of the suprasensory phenomena of pure light, what we note in short is the following: brief flashes and flames most often originate from the liturgical acts (prayer, ritual ablution, etc.). A longer and brighter light is that from the Qorān or from the *dhikr*. There may be visualization of the well-known verse from the chapter Light (24:35): "The image of His light is that of a Niche wherein there is a lamp, the lamp is in a case of glass . . ." Here the "Niche of lights" manifests a light of the prophecy or else of the initiatic quality of the shaykh. Tapers, lamps and live embers manifest the different forms of *dhikr* or else are an effect of the light of gnosis. All the forms of stars which are shown in the Skies of the heart (*āsmān-e del*) are, as in Najm Kobrā, lights manifesting the Angel; i.e., the esoteric aspect of the astronomical Sky that is its homologue (*bātin-e falak*). According to the heart's degree of purity, the star may be seen without its Sky or else with its Sky; in the latter case, the Sky is the "subtle astral mass" of the heart, whereas the star is the light of the Spirit. The Constellated figures manifest the *Animae coelestes*. Sun and moon may appear in various positions, each of which has its meaning. The full moon in the Sky of the heart manifests the effects of the initiation corresponding to the degree of lunar initiation (*walāyat-e qamarīya*); the sun manifests the effects of the solar or total initiation (*w. kollīya*). Several suns together are a manifestation of the perfect Initiates (*Awliyā-e kollī*). Sun and moon contemplated together are the joint manifestation of the form of the shaykh and the form of the absolute initiator.<sup>113</sup>

Sun, moon and stars may appear as though immersed either in the sea or in running water or on the contrary in motionless water, sometimes in a well. All the mystics recognize there the lights of their "spiritual entity." These immersions in a transparent element proclaim the extreme purity of the heart, the state of the "pacified soul," which, at the boundary, will allow the rays of the divine Lights to pierce through all the veils. This is the meaning of the verse in the *sūra* of the Star: "The heart does not belie what it has seen (53:11)," the mystical sense which sanctions the Prophet's visions ("My heart has seen my Lord in the most beautiful of forms") and the theophanies vouchsafed to Abraham and Moses.

Najm Rāzī knows it: it may be asked whether all these theophanies take *place* in the inner, esoteric world or rather in the outer, exoteric world? His answer is that anyone who asks this kind of question remains far from the real situation where the two worlds meet and coincide. In one case it may be that the suprasensory perception is awakened and stimulated by a sensory perception; between the sensory (*ḥissī*) and the suprasensory (*ghaybī*), the exoteric (*zāhir*) and the esoteric (*bātin*), there is synchronism and symbolism; these are even the foundation and criterion of visionary apperception. In another instance, a direct perception of the suprasensory by the organ of the heart may come about without a sensory organ or physical support (see *supra* IV, 1, *aura* and auric perception). In either case this organ of the heart (with the spiritual energy of the *Imagatrix*, effects a transmutation of the sensory so that it is perceived "in Hūrqulyā," on the plane of the *mundus imaginalis*, the *imaginal* world wherein "what is corporeal becomes spirit and what is spiritual assumes a body" ("our method is that of alchemy," said Najm Kobrā).<sup>114</sup> This is the meaning derived by spiritual hermeneutics from the verse on the Light: "God is the light of the Heavens and of the Earth" (24:35), for, in reality and in the true sense, what makes *manifest* (that is, light) and that which is *manifested* (*mazhar*, the theophanic form), what sees and what is seen are the divine Being himself. "When the meaning of Abraham's exclamation: *This is my Lord* has been mystically understood, then sensory and suprasensory, exoteric and esoteric, apparent and hidden, will be one and the same thing."



Who

*Oh widely read, Oh globally travelled one,  
(still earth-bound, still caught beneath the sky),  
what value would the spheres yet hold for you  
were you to catch a glimpse of hidden knowledge?*

*Will your flesh luxuriate forever  
in the boons and blessings of the world?  
Why not for a little while enjoy as well the fruits  
of knowledge with the tongue of the Spirit?*

*The dreamers banquets cannot profit him;  
only the waking know the taste of gain and loss.  
What does the dreamer know of stars and turquoise dome,  
or things the Almighty brings  
to pass upon this dusty sphere?*

*Wake up  
from this charming vision,  
you who have slept and dreamt for forty years,  
and see that of all the friends of your youth not one remains.  
No one is left  
to share your drowse and stupor but the beasts  
and that which donkeys eat is not a blessing  
any more than that which Caesar conquers is a kingdom!*

*Reader if you miss the Path  
I would not be surprised, for I, like you,  
languished in perplexity for years.  
Three hundred ninety four of them had passed  
since the Hijra,  
when my mother dropped me in the dust,  
a voiceless creature like a weed which thrives on soil and rain.  
From this vegetative state I reached  
that of the beasts, and floundered like a bird  
whose wings are clipped, till in the Fourth Age  
I gained the stature of a man  
and let a soul of reason worm its way into my gloomy body.*

Who

*When the clock of years  
had turned some forty-two rounds,  
my conscious self began to seek out wisdom.  
From the mouths of sages or the pages of ancient books  
I heard of the Cosmos,  
of the whirl of Time and the Three Kingdoms;  
but I found myself superior to all around me,  
and among all creatures  
(so I mused)  
there must be one superior to others,  
like the falcon amongst all birds,  
a camel amongst all beasts of burden, the palm amongst the trees,  
the Qur'ān amongst all books, the Ka'abah amongst all houses,  
heart in the body, sun among stars.  
I wondered, and my soul was filled with grief,  
my meditations blasted with fear of all the objects of thought.*

*From every School I searched:  
from Shafiite, Malikite, Hanafite,  
sought a sign of guidance,  
of the Chosen One of Allāh, the Almighty, the Guide;  
and each one pointed me a different way,  
one to China, one to Africa.  
When I asked for a reason,  
or for corroboration from the Qur'ān,  
they recoiled in helplessness, like blind men, like deaf men.  
Then one day, a I read in the Book, the Verse of the Oath,  
in which Allāh proclaims His Hand is above all hands,  
and pondered on that group  
who swore allegiance beneath the Tree  
(like Ja'far, Miqdad, Salman, Budhar)  
I asked myself  
How is it now with that Tree and with that Hand?  
Where shall I see that Hand,  
that group, that Oath?  
I asked, but was rebuffed.*



Who

*They are no more  
– so I was told –  
The Tree, the Hand are gone,  
the Assembly dispersed,  
the Hand concealed and veiled in secrecy.  
Those men were the Companions,  
favoured by that allegiance  
and chosen to be with the Prophet ﷺ in Paradise.*

*But I said to myself  
In the Book it is clear that Aḥmad ﷺ  
is the Messenger ﷺ of Good News, and the Warner,  
luminous as light.*

*If the unbelievers wished to blow it out  
Allāh ﷻ would light it again in spite of them.  
How is it today that no one is left of that Community?  
Surely the word of the Universal Judge cannot be false!  
Whose hand should we grasp, where should we take an oath  
that even we men of latter times might enjoy the justice of heaven?  
Why should it be our fault not to be born in that era?*

*Why should we be deprived of the Prophet ﷺ,  
afflicted and distressed?  
My face grew pale as a yellow blossom in the pain of ignorance.  
I bowed in the wind of doubt like an aging cypress.  
The learned man is like a pomander,  
his knowledge a halo of musk;  
or like a mountain concealing its vein of gold;  
but ore without gold, perfume without aroma,  
are worth no more than dust.*

*Then I arose and set out on my way, remembering  
neither my home nor past nor garden of roses.  
From Persian, Arab, Hindu, Turk and Jew,  
from the folk of Sind, from the Romans, from everyone  
I met the philosopher, Manichee, Sabaeen, atheist,  
I asked, I questioned, I pestered.*

Who

*Many a night I made a stone my pillow, the clouds my tent.  
I sank low as a fish, I ascended as high as the stars above the hills;  
now in a land where water was frozen as marble,  
now in a land where the very dust was hot as a spark,*

*I roamed*

*Now by the sea, now on the high plateau  
or trackless waste, across mountains, sand and streams,  
up and down the precipices,  
coil of rope round my shoulder like a camel driver,  
a pack on my back like a mule,  
inquiring I went my way, searching from city to city, shore to shore.*

*Then one day I reached those city gates  
where angels are servants, where planets and stars are slaves,  
a garden of roses and pines girded round with walls  
of emerald and jasper trees,  
set in a desert of gold-embroidered silk,  
its springs sweet as honey, the river of paradise:  
a city which only Virtue can aspire to reach,  
a city whose cypresses are like the blades of Intellect,  
a city whose sages wear brocaded robes woven of silk .  
And here, before these gates, my Reason spoke:  
Here, within these walls,  
find what you seek and do not leave without it.  
So I approached the Guardian of the Gate,  
and told him of my search.*

*“Rejoice!” He answered.*

*“Your mine has produced a jewel, for beneath this land of Truth  
there flows a crystal ocean of precious pearls and pure clear water  
This is the lofty sphere of exalted stars;  
aye, it is paradise itself,  
the Abode of Houris.”*

*I heard these words freighted with meaning, sweet as honey,  
and felt myself on the threshold of heaven.*

Who

*I told him,*

*“My soul is weak, though my body may seem strong to you.*

*I am in pain, but that is nothing.*

*I refuse a medicine. I cannot understand,*

*I reject all that is beyond the law.”*

*“I am a doctor”, he answered.*

*“Speak to me and tell me all that ails you, every detail.”*

*[Here Nasir burdens the gate-keeper with a hundred questions*

*about the Origin and End of the Universe,*

*the mystery of pre-destination, the purpose of creation,*

*and reason for Allāh sending Messengers to man.*

*He asks a minute abstruse questions*

*of a philosophical and theological nature].*

*Then*

*that sage set his hand upon his heart*

*(a hundred blessings be on that hand and breast!)*

*And said, “I offer you the remedy*

*of proof and demonstration;*

*but if you accept, I shall place a seal upon your lips*

*which must never be broken.”*

*I gave my consent and he affixed the seal.*

*Drop by drop and day by day*

*he fed me the healing potion,*

*‘till*

*my ailment disappeared,*

*my tongue became imbued with eloquent speech;*

*my face, which had been pale as saffron now grew rosy with joy;*

*I who had been a stone was now a ruby;*

*I had been dust – now I was ambergris.*

*He put my hand into the Blessed hand of the Prophet ﷺ,*

*I spoke the Oath beneath that exalted Tree*

*so heavy with fruit, so sweet with cooling shade.*

Who

*Have you ever heard of a sea which flows from fire?  
Have you ever seen a fox become a lion?  
The sun can transmute a pebble, which even the hand  
of Nature can never change, into a gem.  
I am that precious stone,*

*My Sun is he by whose rays this tenebrous world is filled with light.  
In jealousy I cannot speak his name  
in this poem, but can only say that for him  
Plato himself would become a slave.  
He is the teacher, hearer of souls, favoured of Allāh ﷺ,  
image of wisdom,  
fountain of knowledge and Truth.  
Blessed the ship with him for its anchor,  
blessed the city whose sacred gate he ever guards!*

*Oh Countenance of Knowledge,  
Virtues Form,  
Heart of Wisdom, Goal of Humankind,  
Oh Pride of Pride;*

*I stood before thee, pale and skeletal, clad in a woolen cloak,  
and kissed thine hand  
as if it were the grave of the Prophet ﷺ  
or  
The Black Stone of the Ka'aba.*

*Seven years I served you;  
and now,  
wherever I am so long as I live  
I'll use my pen and ink,  
my inkwell and my paper . . . in praise of you!*



Who



*Abu Muin Nasir-i Khusraw  
also known as  
The Ruby of Badakhshān*

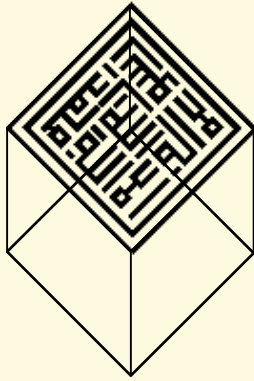
*Abu Muin Nasir-i Khusraw (ناصر خسرو قبادیانی) ﷺ, ranked among the half dozen greatest poets of Persia, was born in Qubadian, a small town in the region of Marv, in 394 A.H./1004 A.D. Little is known of his childhood and early years except for a few references in his book of poetry, the Diwan (دیوان), from which this poem is drawn, and his philosophic works. Our information concerning his life is largely derived from his travel book, Safar Nāma (سفرنامه) which he composed after his seven year journey through the Islamic world as far as Egypt and back again to his native land.*

*After his years of wanderings he finally found refuge in about 1060 in Yamgan in the mountains of Badakhshān (بدخشان/Бадахшон), where he spent the last decades of his life as a hermit, and in the end gathered round him a considerable number of devoted students, who handed down his teachings to succeeding generations.*

Who

NOTES:





noon hierographers  
green mountain  
virginia  
usa